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SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: 2008 COUNTRY REPORTS ON TERRORISM

REF: STATE 120019

**Summary:** Cooperation between Azerbaijan and the United States on counterterrorism predates the September 11, 2001 attacks and the first waiver of Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act in January 2002. For the last several years, the GOAJ has increased its efforts to combat terrorist financing, and has aggressively apprehended and tried members of suspected terrorist groups. It has rendered numerous terrorists and persons suspected of having ties to terrorists. It has also closed organizations operating in Azerbaijan that were suspected of supporting terrorist groups. End Summary.

Proposed report for Azerbaijan in 2008 Patterns of Global Terrorism Report to Congress.

Azerbaijan and the United States have a very good record of cooperation on counterterrorism issues that predates the September 11, 2001 attacks. Azerbaijan assisted in the investigation of the 1998 East Africa Embassy bombings and has cooperated with the U.S. Embassy in Baku to counter terrorist threats against the Mission. After the September 11 attacks, the Government of Azerbaijan expressed unqualified support for the United States and offered invaluable assistance to the U.S.-led counterterrorism coalition. Azerbaijan has granted blanket overflight clearance, engaged in information sharing and law-enforcement cooperation, and has approved numerous landings and refueling operations at Baku's civilian airport in support of U.S. and Coalition military operations in Afghanistan. Azerbaijan supported peacekeeping operations in Iraq from August 2003 to November 2008 with an infantry company of approximately 150 soldiers stationed at the Haditha dam. A platoon of Azerbaijani soldiers has been working with the Turkish peacekeeping contingent in Afghanistan since November 2002, and Azerbaijan is preparing to increase its contingent to 90 personnel, including medical and civil affairs specialists. Azerbaijani forces also contributed for several years to peacekeeping operations in Kosovo, serving alongside Turkish units.

Azerbaijan has also provided unstinting political support to the United States in the Global War on Terrorism. With its 2005 ratification of the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism, Azerbaijan has acceded to all 13 United Nations Conventions on Terrorism. It has also joined 11 European conventions on combating terrorism. In 2003, Azerbaijan implemented UN Security Council resolutions 1368, 1373 and 1377. In May 2005, it joined the Convention of the Council of Europe on terrorism prevention. The government also approved changes to the criminal code that increased the maximum penalty for acts of terrorism from 15 years to life imprisonment and added a provision making the financing of terrorist activities a crime under Azerbaijani law.

While Azerbaijan is a logical route for international mujahedin with ties to terrorist organizations seeking to move people, money, and materiel through the Caucasus, the country actively opposes them. Azerbaijan has stepped up its

efforts and has had some success in reducing their presence and hampering their activities. Azerbaijan has taken steps to combat terrorist financing and identify possible terrorist-related funding by distributing lists of suspected terrorist groups and individuals to local banks. In May 2003, Azerbaijan established an inter-ministerial experts group responsible for drafting anti-money laundering and counterterrorist finance legislation. In December 2006, the experts group, through the President's office, provided its most recent draft to the U.S. Department of Justice and the Council of Europe; the Department of Justice provided comments on the law and discussed it with Azerbaijani officials. The Government's draft law on money laundering is in an advanced stage of the legislative process, and is expected to result in the creation of a Financial Intelligence Unit. In anticipation of future adoption of this law, the U.S. Government has continued to train prosecutors, investigators and judges on implementing anti-money laundering and anti-terrorist financing law enforcement techniques.

In February 2007, the Ministry of National Security (MNS) rounded up 15 Azerbaijani citizens who were members of the "Northern Mahdi Army," a jihadist organization the government linked to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps.

In November 2007, 11 Azerbaijani citizens were arrested over a number of days throughout Azerbaijan in connection with a late October 2007 threat against the U.S. Embassy in Baku which resulted in the Embassy suspending public services for two days. The group consisted of Azerbaijani citizens led by a renegade radicalized Azerbaijani army officer, Kamran Asadov. He went absent without leave from his unit with four assault rifles, a machine gun, 20 grenades and a large amount of cartridges on 24 October. The group carried out a lethal attack on a Lukoil gas station in Baku on October 30, likely to fund their operations. According to press reports, members of the groups told the MNS that they planned to attack the U.S. Embassy. All the weapons and at-large members of the group have been seized and prosecutions are ongoing at the time of this report.

On August 17, an unknown assailant or assailants attacked Baku's main Sunni mosque, known as Abu Bakr, with grenades, killing three and wounding eight. The government closed the mosque after the attack. In late October, a Baku court ordered the mosque reopened, but soon reversed itself. The mosque remains closed and the investigation into the attack is ongoing. The government detained thirteen suspects in late August and early September in connection with the attack. In its public statement on the attack September 2, the MNS alleged that Ilgar Mollachiyev, an Azerbaijani citizen associated with extremist activities in Russian Dagestan, and his brother-in-law Samir Mehtiyev had masterminded the attack. Mollachiyev was killed by Russian security forces in Dagestan in September.

There is no evidence in 2008 that terrorists find safe haven in Azerbaijan or that there is any terrorist group operating in Azerbaijan which meets the guidelines defined for this report.

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